



Mr. *PYLE's*  
S E R M O N

Preach'd at

St. *JAMES's Westminster,*

On *Sunday* April 13. 1718.



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MR. PYLE'S

2 E R M O N

in the

ST. JAMES'S

On Sunday April 1st 1878.

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*The Pillar and Ground of Truth.*

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A  
S E R M O N

Preach'd at

The Parish-Church

O F

St. JAMES's Westminster,

On Sunday April 13. 1718.

In the Afternoon.

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By THOMAS PYLE, M. A.  
*Lecturer of Lyn Regis in Norfolk.*

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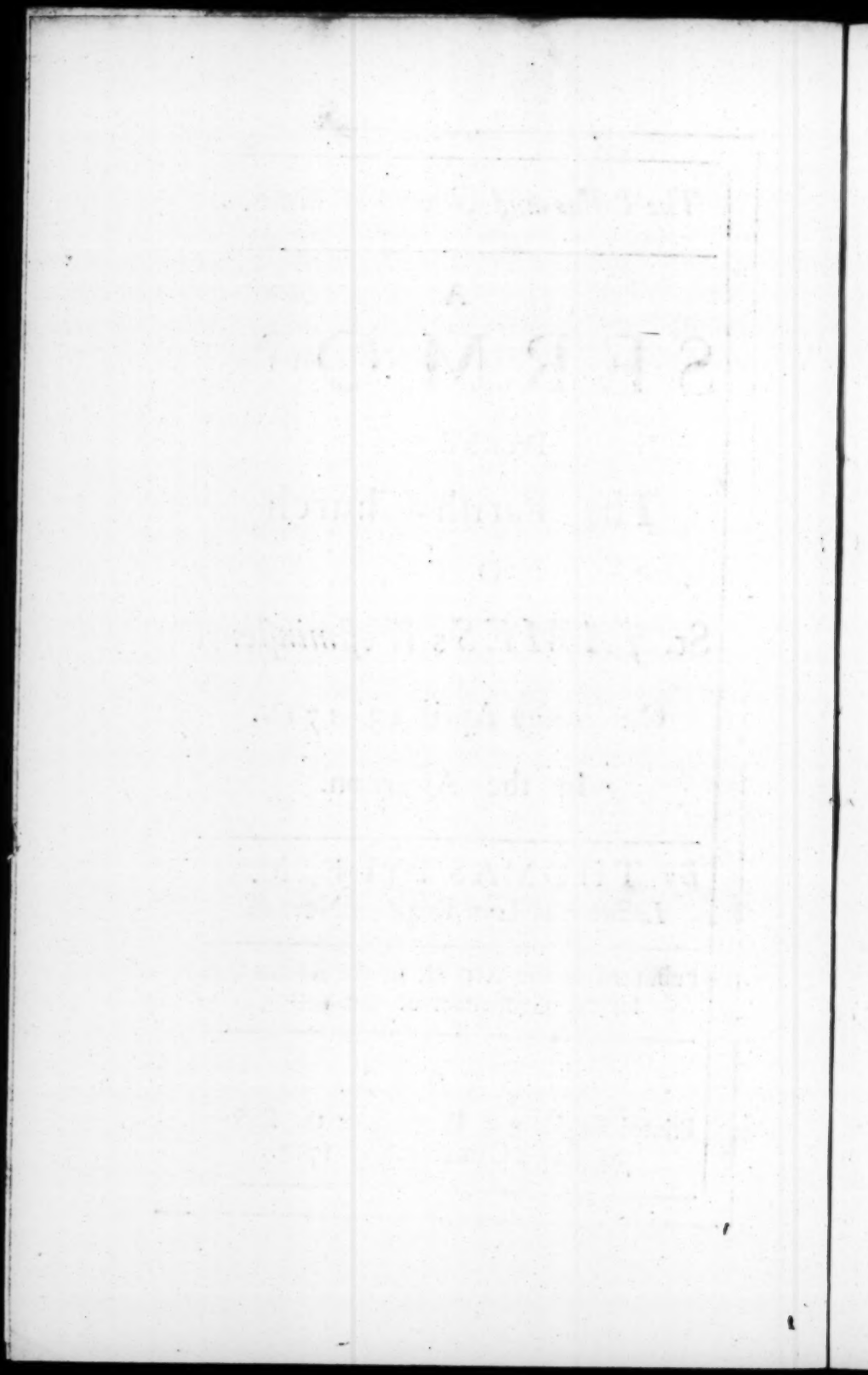
Published at the Request of the Rector, and  
several Gentlemen of the Vestry,

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L O N D O N:

Printed for JOHN WYAT, at the *Rose* in  
St. Paul's Church-yard. 1718.

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I TIM. iii. Ver. 15.

*---That thou mayest know how thou  
oughtest to behave thy self in the  
House of God, which is the  
Church of the living God, the  
Pillar and Ground of Truth.*



HE Wisdom and Goodness  
of God, in discovering to  
Mankind the most impor-  
tant Instances of Truth, in  
the Revelation of his di-  
vine Will, has not been more remark-  
able than the perverse Temper and Pra-  
ctice of Men hath been in disguising them,  
for promoting their own secular Ends  
and Purposes.

No Instance of this is more observable  
than the Case of Government and Obe-  
dience.

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dience. *Temporal* Authority is spoken of, throughout all the *Old Testament*, in Phrases and Expressions agreeable to the several Times, Persons, and Circumstances treated of, without any stated Limits of Prerogatives, or Privileges, or Designation of Persons; excepting only with Respect to some Instances of the *Jewish* Government, where God, being himself the immediate Disposer and Supreme King, expressly chose and declared his own Vicegerents, who were treated and characterized accordingly. In the *New Testament*, our Lord and his Apostles, proposing to erect a *Spiritual* Kingdom only, interposed not at all in the Nature of *Civil Governments*; took them all as they found them, laying down, or rather confirming no other but those plain Rules and general Obligations, which promote the common Rights of Government, and the Peace of Mankind, upon the foot of Reason, Nature, and Providence.

And yet these very *Scriptures* have sometimes been unreasonably wrested toward the setting up. of such a *Civil* Power, as would prove the entire Destruction of all the good Ends and Purposes of Power.

*Ec-*

*Ecclesiastical* Power and Discipline has met with the same Treatment. As the Religion of Christ is purely Spiritual, the Rules and Orders concerning the Exercise of Authority and Power amongst the Members of it, are purely such. They are delivered with so much Simplicity and Plainness, are so adapted to the Improvement of our Reason, and to the Advancement of Virtue, Charity, and Truth; that none could have dared to mis-interpret them, but those whose Business it was to settle a new Idea and Signification of the word *Church*; i. e. instead of meaning the *Body of Christian Believers*, to mean one certain *uninterrupted Succession of Ministers and Rulers of the Church*; and so set up themselves for a *Rule of Truth*, or, which is all one, for *infallible Interpreters of Christ's Rules*.

The Church of *Rome*, growing to be the Head of this Mystery of Iniquity, [the Mystery spoken of by the Apostles themselves, and beginning to work very early in the Christian World,] has so long infected all Nations with its Poison, that it is not without exceeding great Labour, Difficulty, and Danger too, that good and impartial Men have been endeavour-  
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ing to undeceive the World, and settle the Peace of Christianity upon its proper Foundation, viz. *The Love of God and of Truth, the free Study of the Scriptures, and the Exercise of Charity and Forbearance towards our Brethren.*

Many are the Texts that have been alledged as Proofs of a Privilege belonging to one certain uninterrupted Succession of *Men*, to become the uncontrouleable Rulers of other Mens Faith, and *Imposers*, not only in Matters of Form and Decency, but also in Matters of Faith and Conscience, for the sake of an External Unity and Uniformity. The Text I have now chosen, wherein the *Church* is represented as the *Pillar and Ground of Truth*, hath been esteemed one of the strongest to this Purpose.

To rescue it from which great Abuse, I shall endeavour to set it in a true Light, by considering,

I. What *Truth* it is which the Apostle here speaks of, and *what*, and *who* it is that he here calls the *Pillar and Ground* of it.

II. In

II. In what Sense, and how far any particular Persons, whether more or fewer, whether separate or united, can be understood to be so.

After which, I shall draw such natural Inferences, as may, I hope, be serviceable, if duly considered, toward the Peace of our Country, and the flourishing Estate both of our Protestant Government and Religion.

I. By the *Truth*, emphatically so called in this Place, we are plainly to understand the *Religion of Christ*, as revealed by him and his Apostles to the World. It is stiled *Truth*, in opposition to all *false* or *more imperfect* Religions. And, as being the Effect of the free Mercy and Bounty of *God* towards Man, 'tis sometimes called *Grace and Truth*; and, from the *Spiritual* Nature of its *Laws*, in Contradistinction to External and Carnal *Ceremonies* of Worship, it has in Scripture the Character of *Spirit and Truth*. This Religion is sometimes described by Summaries of certain *Doctrines* or *Facts* to be believed; such as are the Incarnation, Birth, Ascension, Intercession, and future coming to Judgment

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ment, of Jesus Christ our Saviour, for the Salvation of Men : Which Doctrines and Facts are promiscuously termed the *Mysteries of Godliness*, in the words following the Text. At other times, this Religion is described by certain *Rules* and *Precepts* for our *moral Obedience*. So the *Truth* in Jesus, is, the putting off the old Man, which is corrupt according to deceitful Lusts, and putting on the new Man — after the Image of God, in true Holiness ; putting away Lying, speaking Truth to our Neighbour ; putting away Anger, and not letting the Sun go down upon our Wrath, &c. Eph. iv. 21--26. This is the Truth, by which our Minds are purified, 1 Pet. i. 22. The Truth [or Religion] which is evil spoken of, 2 Pet. ii. 2. and toward the propagating whereof the Apostles and Ministers are called *Fellow-helpers*, and *Fellow-labourers*, 2 John viii. All which revealed Truths were to the first Christians their Rule of Faith, Conscience, and Salvation, as spoken from the Mouth of Christ and his Apostles immediately ; and they are so to us now, so far and no farther than as left us upon Record by the *Writings* of those Apostles.

It



It is next to be consider'd *what* or *who* the Apostle here speaks of as *The Pillar and Ground of this Truth*, or this *Religion*.

This is affirmed by the *Romanists*, with infinite Zeal, to be meant of the *Church*, i. e. of the *Ministers* and *Clergy* of the *Church*; who yet never were, that I know of, so much as once distinguished by the Name of the *Church*, in the whole New Testament. They maintain also, that there is not, nor can be any *Ministry* out of their *own Church*; and therefore no *Pillars*, no *Ground of Truth*, but in *Popery*.

*Protestant* Interpreters have generally understood it to be meant of the *whole visible Church*, and to be applicable to all true Communities and Branches of it. And they have generally sat down contented with this Interpretation, as agreeable to those figurative Expressions, wherein the Church is, in Scripture, compared to a *Body*, to a *Building*, and to a *House*. And many, I fear, would be unwilling to part with this Interpretation, which carries in it a Shew of some great *Authority*, which most Bodies of Men, God knows, are very fond of laying too much Claim to.

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Whereas, in Reality, to understand this of the *Church* at all, in this Place, is a very forced Interpretation, disagreeable to the Scope of the Apostle's Argument, and makes a hard Construction of the Words; nay, destroys the very Metaphor he is here making use of.

The *visible Church*, the Body of Christian Believers, is indeed commonly stiled the *House of God*, and *God's Building*, and *Temple*. But how can the same thing be, at once, called a *House*, and a *Pillar*, or *Basis*, or \* *Buttress* of the same *House*? With what Propriety of Speech can any thing be stiled, in the same Breath, and under the same Idea, the *Whole* and the *Part* of the same Thing? The *Church* is the *House*, supposed, by these Interpreters, to contain, or to consist of, the *Truth*; now tho' this *whole* Building might possibly sometimes be described by, and included in, some special and principal *Parts* of it, such as *Foundation*, *Pillars*, &c. yet when this or any other thing is designedly described under its *whole* and *complete* Notion, it can never be, in the same Breath, said to be a *Part* of it self.

Thus,

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\* *Ἐκτίσις*.



Thus, the whole City or Temple of *Jerusalem* is described by its *Gates*, and its *Foundations*, Psal. lxxxvii. 1, 2. As in like manner, the *Church* of God is, in the Old Testament, represented by a *Vine*, Psal. lxxx. 8, 14. And in the new Testament, by the *Branches*. But neither is the *Temple* and its *Gates*, nor the *Vine* and its *Branches*, ever put for one and the same thing, in one and the same Passage and Description.

Nor indeed is it so here, in the natural Construction of the Words. For it ought not to be render'd *THE Pillar and Ground of Truth*, as if it referred to the *Church*, but Στόλη & Ἑδραίωμα, *A Pillar and Basis*, or *Buttress*, of the *Truth*, referring plainly to the *Person* of *Timothy*, to whom all the foregoing Advices and Rules had been given, about the Choice of *Ministers* into the *Church*, as *Fellow-helpers* and *Supporters* of the same *Truth*. And so the whole Sense is this; *How thou oughtest to behave thyself, like a Pillar and Support of the Truth, in the House of God, which is the Church of the living God.*

Now this is perfectly agreeable to the usual manner of the Scripture-Phrases, wherein the *Ministers* and *Messengers* of God are stiled *Pillars* and *Foundations*. Thus  
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the Prophet *Jeremiah* is called a *Pillar*, Jer. i. 18. *Son of Man, I have made thee a Pillar.* Thus the Apostles and Prophets are called *Foundations*, Eph. ii. 20. In which Sense *Peter* is said to be a *Rock*, or one of the *Foundation-stones* of the Church, Mat. xvi. 18. Thus again, *James* and *John* are stiled *Pillars*, Gal. ii. 9. And, *Him that overcometh, saith Christ, I will make him a Pillar in the House of my God*, Rev. iii. 12.

Thus is this Phrase always applied to particular Persons, but never, I believe, so much as once, to a *Body* of Men as a *visible Church*.

II. Having thus shewn to *whom* these Titles belong, it is next to be consider'd in *what Sense* and *how far* they must be understood to belong to any *Persons*, whether more or fewer, whether separated or united.

Now they are generally taken to imply, that such Persons have the Privilege of being *infallible Interpreters* of the Word and *Rule* of Truth, or at least of having a sufficient authoritative Power of *deciding* in Matters of Faith and Religion; challenging an Assent and Compliance, or Silence at least, from all People. I shall therefore

therefore inquire into the Truth of this ; *First*, with respect to the *Apostles* themselves, and the first *Ministers* of Christ ; and *Secondly*, with respect to the *whole Body* of true Christian Believers, which is the full Notion of the *Church* of Christ.

I. The Apostles and first Ministers of the Gospel, being intrusted and commissioned to propagate its Truths, and establish its Authority in the World, against the many Prejudices, the great Ignorance, and Prepossessions that Mankind then generally laboured under ; were invested with such Inspiration and extraordinary Powers, as were necessary to confirm and evidence it to be from God. When any Misunderstandings of the Sense of its Laws, or the Design of its Revelation, happen'd amongst Believers, the Apostles interposed and decided them, as far as was necessary ; in an *authoritative* way, as far as they had *Inspiration* to that Purpose ; and in *argumentative* or *persuasive* ways, where they had no *infallible* Direction. And, in all these Cases, they ever behaved themselves so, as not in the least to insinuate themselves to be *absolute Imposers* in Matters of Faith and Religion, or so much as *arbitrary Interpreters* of their  
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**Master's Laws.** When they had confirmed their Doctrine even by Miracles, they forced it upon no Body, nor inflicted upon any one any Penalties merely for not believing; tho' they did indeed punish some, for their wicked, immoral, and obstinate Disobedience to the Religion they had pretended to be convinced of; [as in the Cases of *Ananias*, and the incestuous *Corinthian*] but herein they had the immediate Warrant of God, and struck with *his*, not with *their own* Hand, for the present Confirmation of the Truth of their *Mission*, without which the Christian Religion had been at a Stand.

On the other hand, the *general* Method, apparent through all the Writings of these Inspired Men, by which they applied themselves to the Minds of Men, in order to gain their Assent and Compliance, was that of *Argument*, *Reason*, and *Perswasion*; renouncing the Title of being Lords over Mens Faith, or absolute Constrainers of their Consciences; but referring them to their Master's Rule, as *Ambassadors of Christ*, *praying and exhorting them, in his stead, to be reconciled to God*; and by such ways endeavouring to recommend themselves to every *Man's* Conscience in the sight of God.

In

In one Word, the *inspired Apostles themselves* made use of their *Infallibility*, and the *Authority* annexed to it, in no Cases, but such as could not be decided without it. When Christ's Religion was settled, and committed to plain *written Rules*, there was no further Occasion for any *absolute Guides* or *Interpreters*, for any humane Judges *authoritatively* to determine for us. But the Church was left to an industrious Application to the standing *written Law* it self; and all are to study it, and live according to the best Information they can get into it.

2. Therefore *Secondly*, the *Church*, in its truest Acceptation, taken for the *Body of Christian Believers*, whether in the *whole*, or as represented by the *Clergy*; cannot be understood to be such a *Ground of Truth*, as to become an *absolute Judge*, or *authoritative Interpreter* of the Laws of Christ.

The *Church*, taken in either of these Senses, never *was* [not to say, never *can be*] gather'd together; never can meet to decide *Doctrines*, or make *Creeds*, or lay down *Determinations* in controverted Matters of *Faith*: [For of Matters of *Form* and *Decency*, and *External Rites*, I here speak not.] But all its Members always were, and are still denominated truly such, by a sincere



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Profession, Study, and Practice of the Laws of *Christ*, as *he* left them.

Ever since the Departure of inspired and infallible *Apostles*, and the Establishment of Christianity in the *written Rule*; Christians have known no other *Infallibility* or *mere Authority* in Matters of Faith but this, *That the Word of God is infallibly true*; and *those that live up to the best Knowledge they can get of it, are infallibly saved.*

There are no *Notes* of Distinction to know the *Church* by, but that of *Truth*, or the Agreeableness of Mens Belief and Practice to the revealed Word of *Christ*, whose Disciples only they are. No further than we know *this*, can we possibly know *who* are the real Members which constitute the *Church*; and therefore 'tis impossible for us to be guided by their Judgment.

If it could be supposed that St. *Paul* intended this *Character* in the Text, to belong to any one *particular* Church, it must be that of *Ephesus*; for to *that* Church did *Timothy* now belong, as a Spiritual Guide. But of the Church of *Ephesus*, or its Doctrines, we know nothing [of any *Certainty* at least] more than the Rules prescribed by St. *Paul* in this *Epistle*.



*file.* And consequently 'tis the *Apostle's Doctrine*, not the *Church itself*, that we must repair to as the *Ground of Truth*.

Moreover, as no Society can any otherwise be known by us to be *the Church of Christ*, but by our knowing it to hold the *Truth*; so we cannot know it doth so, but upon supposal that *we our selves* first understand those fundamental and important *Truths*, by which we are to form a Judgment of the true *Church*. And if so, then what need can we have of the *Church's* Direction to find out the *Truth*; that is, in other Words, to find out *her self*? Unless it be said, that after we do know the *greater Truths*, we still want a Guide to the *Lesser*; or that, when *we* have judged of the *Church* first, we want the *Church* to judge of *us* ever after: Which is a *Circle* of the most palpable Absurdity.

So rightly did St. *Chrysostom* determine this Point, in few Words, in his Comment upon this very Text; *The Church is so far from being the Pillar and Ground of Truth, that, on the contrary, the Truth is the Pillar and Ground of the Church.*

Hence it must follow, that if the *universal Church* it self cannot lay claim to the Authority of an *absolute Rule*, no *par-*

*ticular Communities* can have any possible Right to it.

For the *Rulers* of the Church, therefore, and the *Ministers* of Christ, to be the *Pillars and Supports of the Truth*, can signify no more than this, "That, as the Religion of Christ has discovered all necessary and saving Truths to such as hear, believe, and duly embrace it; it is the Office of the Ministers to promote, encourage and propagate these Truths, by all proper Endeavours, agreeable to the Nature of *Religion* and of *Truth*; to explain it by the original *Rule and Standard* of it in the Word of God; to study that *Rule*, as the only *Authority* they go upon; and to perswade Men to embrace and practise it, by all reasonable Arguments, and truly spiritual and religious Motives.

III. Now from this Account and Explanation of the Apostles Doctrine, as deduced from the Words of the Text, we may draw the following *Conclusions*, exceedingly conducive to the Peace of all Christian Countries, and to the Welfare of the Protestant Religion, and all Protestant Governments.

1<sup>st</sup>, If the Conduct of the Ministers of Christ and the spiritual Rulers of his Church ought to be directed toward the Propagation and Support of religious Truth; Then *they themselves* ought constantly and heartily to encourage the free Study of, the impartial Search into, and a safe and undisturbed Appeal to, the Rule and Standard of this Truth, [as laid down in the written Word of God,] in all sorts of People they have to do with. They ought, with all Candour and Simplicity, to offer their Explications, their Decisions, and all the Methods and Terms of their Communion, to be tried and examined by that superior Authority; always remembering, that the Obligations of true Religion are not of Men, but from Heaven; and that all Assent and Compliance to such Obligations, in Matters of revealed Religion, ought to be gained from Men by Motives truly reasonable, and properly religious; as being the Effect of Conviction in the Mind, with regard to Truth, abstracted from all external Impulses of humane Terrors.

This is to be Religious; this is to bring Men to be Christians, to bring them to an honest and sincere Apprehension and Profession

fession of the *Truth* of the *Gospel* of *Christ*, by the Use of a free, impartial, and conscientious Examination into it, as founded in the Declarations and Sanctions of our supreme *Law-giver*. Further than this sincere Enquiry can carry any Person, *God* cannot be supposed to require; and therefore 'tis wholly unjustifiable for *Man* to demand.

The several Practices upon Mankind, opposite to all this, make up the Idea of *Popery*. A Term not absolutely and locally to be confined to *Rome* alone, but proportionably applicable to all *Persons*, and all *Communities*, according to the Degrees in which any of them are found to set up themselves as *Lords over Mens Faith*, instead of being the *Pillars and Supports of Christ's Truths*, by Methods and Ways of his own Appointment, agreeable to the Nature of *Truth*, the Nature of rational *Men*, and the Nature of *God* himself.

*Popery* or *arbitrary Impositions* are, so far as they are practised, the same thing, whether in *Italy*, or in *Geneva*; whether in *Spain*, or *Scotland*, or *England*; in a word, whether in *Romish* Countries, or those that stile themselves *Protestant*.

2. If the Ministers of Christ are to be the Maintainers and Supporters of *Christian Truth*, by the diligent Study of its *Rules*, and by Exhortations and Persuasions suitable to its Nature; then it must be the *Duty* and *Interest* of all *Christian Governments* and *Magistrates* to protect, encourage, and defend them, in all their Searches after this *Truth*, in all their diligent and peaceable Proposals of it; and never to suffer their honest and laborious Enquiries to be stifled either by the arbitrary Censures, and uncharitable Usage of *others*, or by any discouraging Confinements upon them from *Civil Power* and *Authority*.

This it becomes them to do, both as *Christians* and as *Magistrates*. As they are *Christians*, Civil Governours *themselves* are supposed to have taken upon them this Religion, upon free Choice, serious Examination, and Conviction of its superior *Truth* and Excellency. From which very *Principle*, they are obliged to allow and to countenance, in all Persons, the like diligent Enquiry into the Mind and Will of God, in the several *Parts* of that *Rule*, by the entertaining of and Obedience to which, both they and we are truly denominated *Christians*. For by the same Reason that  
they



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*they* entertain any Religion in the *whole*, they must be, in their Consciences, bound to give all the Encouragement they can to serious and careful Discoveries of the true Sense and Meaning of all the *particular Doctrines and Laws* of that Religion.

Especially when they consider themselves as *Christian Rulers*, this Obligation will appear in greater Strength. The End of *Government* is the Preservation of *Civil Peace, Right and Property*; the End of Religion is, the Knowledge and Practice of divine *Truth*. No *Christian Government* therefore can be understood to encourage and support the Ministers of *Christ*, in a truly *Christian Way*, but by supporting them in studying and propagating the *Truth* of *Christ*, as it lies in *his own* Declarations, and not as held forth in any particular Schemes and Explanations of mere *humane* and *fallible* Authority. For while by the *one* of these Ways they protect the Church as the *Body of Christ*, by the *other* they support it only as a *Humane, Temporal, and Political* Establishment.

3. *Lastly*, From hence appears the inviolable Privilege, and indispensable Duty of all Christians, of what Denomination soever, to study the Laws and essential Ob-



Obligations of their Religion, as delivered by their great Master himself; in order to such a reasonable *Faith* as may make their religious Principles truly their *own*, and such a *conscientious Practice* as will render them proper Subjects of the promised *Rewards* in the future Life.

To say, that the Vulgar are unqualified for such a Study and Inquiry, is to say, that either Christianity is not a *reasonable Service*, or that Christians are solemnly to be baptized into, and make Profession of *Principles*, which [even at Years of Discretion] they are incapable of *understanding*.

For any Persons to be obliged to make any thing a part of their *Religion*, whereof they can form no Judgment, is nothing but *Words* without any *Meaning* contained in them.

But the essential or fundamental Doctrines of *Christianity* are of quite another kind; all that we are *baptized* into being equally perfective of every Mind, and, at the same Time, adequate and suitable to every Capacity; *plain*, because *necessary*; and therefore *necessary* to all, because [and so far and no farther than] they are *plain*.

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For whatever, and how many soever may be the more *speculative* Truths, in the Attainment whereof studious Minds may commendably improve, proportionably to their several Abilities; yet *Salvation* [which is equally proposed to *All*] is and can be annexed to none but those, which concern the Practices needful to such Habits and moral Accomplishments as are required of All, in order to raise them to the Likeness of God, and to their Happiness in Him; which is the main Purpose of true Religion.

And thus may every Member of the *Church of Christ*, in his Station, become a Credit and Support to the *Truth*! The *Magistrate*, by protecting and countenancing the Search of it; the *Minister* in holy things, by encouraging, and with a peaceable and sincere Freedom, explaining and propagating it to Mankind; and *every Man* in particular using his best Endeavours to find and receive it in the Love thereof.

This, and this only, is having the *Reality*, and not the mere *Name* of Christianity; this is making the Church to become indeed the *Beauty of Holiness*,  
the

of TRUTH. 27  
the House of God, even the Church of  
the living God.

To whom be all Honour, Glory, and  
Praise for evermore. Amen.

F I N I S.



*Published by the Author.*

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